
Japanese Farmers, Mexican Workers, and the Making of Transpacific Borderlands

ABSTRACT Launched by Mexican farmworkers against Japanese farmers in Los Angeles, the 1933 El Monte Berry Strike became one of California's largest labor conflicts. The strike evolved from a local conflict into an international problem in which anti-Japanese sentiment travelled across the U.S.-Mexico border, merged with Mexican nationalism, and forced Japanese residents in Mexico to issue an unexpected pro-strike statement against their co-ethnics in Los Angeles. Using Japanese diplomatic documents and local ethnic newspapers, this article details the process by which Mexican nationalism trumped ethnic solidarity among Japanese immigrants in the transpacific borderlands, where local and international concerns of Japan, Mexico, and the United States intersected. The exacerbating situation in Mexico, rather than in California, played a decisive role in the settlement of the strike. **KEYWORDS** Japanese immigrants, Mexican immigrants, triracial hierarchy, Los Angeles, Baja California, transpacific borderlands, Great Depression

In June 1933, Mexican farmworkers went on strike against Japanese tenant farmers in the small community of El Monte in Los Angeles County. Quickly spreading to other areas of Southern California, involving more than five thousand strikers, and lasting more than a month, the El Monte Berry Strike became one of the state's largest labor conflicts in a Great Depression year that was witness to at least thirty-seven agricultural strikes.¹ More than just a labor and interethnic issue, the El Monte strike was an international problem involving the peoples and governments of Japan,

1. Ronald W. López, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," *Aztlán* 1, no. 1 (Apr., 1970): 101–2, 105–6. As explained in the first section of this article, most Japanese farmers in Los Angeles County were tenants. Thus, in this article, "Japanese farmers" means "Japanese tenant farmers." In 1929, Japanese farmers cultivated 33,730 acres in Los Angeles County, 98 percent of which were leased lands. See Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi Kankō Iinkai (Publishing Committee of Japanese in Southern California: A History of 70 Years), ed., *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi* (Japanese in Southern California: A History of 70 Years) (Los Angeles, 1960), 56 (hereafter cited as *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*).

Mexico, and the United States. The strike's transnational dimension was evident in a letter to the editor of *La Opinión*, Los Angeles's ethnic Mexican newspaper. What is intriguing about the letter is not that it supported the Mexican strikers and opposed the Japanese farmers, but that it was written by Japanese immigrants living across the border in Baja California, who condemned the labor exploitation by the Japanese in Los Angeles as "inhumane and contrary to friendly and cooperative relations that must exist between the employer and the worker."²

Historians have studied the El Monte strike not simply as a local conflict but also in terms of U.S.-Mexico relations.³ Yet no one has examined the strike from the perspective of the Japanese government and Japanese immigrants in both the United States and Mexico.⁴ This article does so by focusing largely on Japanese diplomatic documents and the ethnic newspaper *Rafu Shimpō*, while drawing on Mexican diplomatic documents as well. These sources reveal that the El Monte strike generated anti-Japanese sentiment in Southern California, which spread across the border to Mexico and eventually pressured Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles to soften their uncompromising stance on the strike and to accept a settlement. In this way, conflict between Japanese farmers and Mexican workers in Southern California

2. "Los Japoneses de Baja California Apoyan a Los Huelguistas," *La Opinión*, June 30, 1933. The original Spanish messages are "La Asociación Japonesa de la Baja California . . . ha averiguado que el proceder de estos súbditos japoneses en California es inhumano y atentatorio a las relaciones de amistad y cooperación que deben existir entre el patrón y el trabajador."

3. See López, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933"; Devra Anne Weber, "The Organizing of Mexican Agricultural Workers: Imperial Valley, and Los Angeles 1928-34, An Oral History Approach," *Aztlán* 3, no. 2 (1972): 307-50; Charles Wollenberg, "Race and Class in Rural California: The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," *California Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (July 1972): 155-64; Abraham Hoffman, "The El Monte Berry Pickers' Strike, 1933: International Involvement in a Local Labor Dispute," *Journal of the West* 12, no. 1 (1973): 71-84; Francisco E. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982); Gilbert G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); "The 1933 Los Angeles County Farm Workers Strike," *New Political Science* 20, no. 4 (Dec., 1998): 441-58.

4. For brief mentions, see David J. O'Brien and Stephen S. Fugita, *The Japanese American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 30-31; Noritaka Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō: Karifornia no Nihonjin Imin Shakai* (Immigrant Agriculture: The Japanese Immigrant Society in California) (Tokyo: Kokonshoin, 1993), 79-80. For other works related to Japanese-Mexican relations, see Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (1994; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 183-213; Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 105-22.

contributed to the formation of “transpacific borderlands” framed by intersecting local and diplomatic concerns of Japan, Mexico, and the United States.⁵ A key, but often overlooked dimension of the history of U.S.-Mexico borderlands were the interactions between the Japanese in Southern California and their co-ethnics in Mexico.⁶ Japanese immigrants on both sides of the border faced nativist and racist prejudice that threatened to undermine their agricultural enterprises, while developing economic and cultural ties with each other across the border. The strike, however, exposed the limits of this transborder ethnic solidarity as the Japanese in Mexico supported the strikers in Los Angeles and thus fell in line with Mexican nationalism. In the end, such nationalism trumped ethnic solidarity among Japanese immigrants in the transpacific borderlands.

The analysis of Japanese experience during the El Monte strike unfolds in three chronologically arranged sections. The first focuses on the early stage of the strike by detailing how Japanese farmers and diplomats in Los Angeles responded to the demands of Mexican strikers. The second analyzes the impact of the strike on Japanese-Mexican relations in Los Angeles and the Mexican border city of Mexicali by focusing on growing transborder anti-Japanese sentiment and on the experience of Japanese immigrants in Mexicali. The final section explores how anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexico forced Japanese diplomats and farmers in Los Angeles to reach an agreement with the Mexican strikers and how they interpreted the unexpected repercussions of the strike in Mexicali. The transpacific perspective helps us understand that the exacerbating situation in Mexico, rather than in California, played a decisive role in the settlement of the El Monte strike.

5. For “trans-Pacific-borderlands,” see Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). See also Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010). This article provides a case study of transpacific history by detailing the processes in which anti-Japanese sentiment and diplomatic information travelled across the Pacific Ocean and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and its consequences. For transpacific history, see Lon Kurashige, Madeline Y. Hsu, and Yujin Yaguchi, “Introduction: Conversations on Transpacific History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (May, 2014): 183–88.

6. For Japanese in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, see Eiichiro Azuma, “Community Formation across the National Border: The Japanese of the U.S.-Mexican Californias,” *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 39, no. 1 (2006): 30–44; Yu Tokunaga, “Hainichi Iminhō to Zai Mekishiko Nihonjin: Beiboku Kokkyō Chiiki ni okeru Nihonjin Imin Shakaiken no Hatten” (The Japanese Exclusion Act and Japanese Immigrants in Mexico: The Development of the Transborder Ethnic Japanese Community in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands), *Annual Review of Migration Studies* 24 (June 2018): 65–82.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE EL MONTE BERRY STRIKE

The El Monte strike was a historical product of Japanese and Mexican immigration to Los Angeles, where white landowners had control over local profitable agribusiness using Japanese and Mexican immigrant labor. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the ethnic Japanese and Mexican populations in Los Angeles County dramatically increased. The San Francisco earthquake in 1906 and the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 affected the southward migration of the Japanese and the northward migration of Mexicans, respectively.⁷ The number of ethnic Japanese rose from 209 in 1900 to 35,390 in 1930, and the number of ethnic Mexicans from 1,618 (as a foreign-born white population) in 1900 to 167,024 (as a racial group) in 1930. In that year, Japanese and Mexicans constituted about 78 percent of the non-white population in Los Angeles County.⁸ Since California's revised Alien Land Law of 1920 prohibited Japanese nationals from purchasing and leasing land, they had to use the names of their U.S.-born children to lease land from white landowners as tenant farmers. At the same time, Mexicans had gradually become the major source of farmworkers for Japanese tenant farmers since the first decade of the twentieth century.⁹ Ultimately, the exclusion of Japanese immigrants in 1924 stopped the flow of migrant labor from Japan. In 1929, the number of Japanese residents engaged in agriculture increased to 8,882, and their children increased to 12,355. As Japanese farmers employed Mexican farmworkers, they came to develop interethnic relations that were mutually dependent, though charged with labor and racial tensions.¹⁰ By the 1930s, a triracial hierarchy had developed in Los Angeles agriculture.¹¹

7. Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō*, 28–34; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9, 19–21, 235–38.

8. U.S. Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Population* (Washington D.C., 1901), Table 34, “Foreign Born Population, Distributed According to Country of Birth, by Counties,” 738–39; U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population* (Washington, D.C., 1932), Table 13, “The Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1930” and Table 17, “Indians, Chinese, and Japanese, 1910 to 1930, and Mexicans, 1930, for Counties and for Cities of 25,000 or More,” 252, 266.

9. Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō*, 28–34, 51–53.

10. *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 53, 57. Even before the California Alien Land Acts, Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles tended to become tenant farmers. See Masakazu Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil: A History of the Issei in United States Agriculture*, 2 vols (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1992), 1: 292, 400.

11. Different types of triracial hierarchy also developed in other areas such as Northern California and Hawai'i. See Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism*

In this situation, the Japanese played a role of the middleman-minority who built ethnic solidarity by organizing ethnic agricultural associations, strengthening distribution networks, and operating vegetables stands to sell their produce.¹²

El Monte was one of many communities in Southern California where Mexicans worked for Japanese farmers. A small community in the San Gabriel Valley, El Monte was about thirteen miles east of downtown Los Angeles, with a population of sixteen thousand. Ethnic Mexicans made up approximately 20 percent of the community's population, while ethnic Japanese accounted for about 5 percent, with the rest being white Americans. Throughout the broader San Gabriel Valley, Japanese farmers leased land from white landowners and hired Mexican farmworkers to cultivate approximately 80 percent of six to seven hundred acres of berries. Jesusita Torres, a Mexican American woman, remembered, "They [Japanese farmers] would work in the field, but you knew they were the boss." In El Monte, both ethnic Japanese and Mexican residents faced racial segregation that excluded non-whites from more affluent white areas. For example, Japanese and Mexican children went to the same segregated school, where no white children attended.¹³ Yet, a cultural divide existed between Japanese and Mexican children, as Mexican American resident Patty Holguin recalled: "I thought it was so weird to see the food they [the Japanese] ate, just as they probably thought we were weird with our tacos."¹⁴

The Great Depression hit this triracial community of El Monte, particularly afflicting Mexican residents. Since May of 1933, Mexican farmworkers in El Monte had been demanding a pay increase from fifteen cents (approximately \$2.91 in 2018) to thirty-five cents an hour, due to that season's abundant harvest. Japanese farmers, however, rejected the farmworkers' demand, arguing that they could not afford to increase wages because the price of their crop

in *Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Moon-kie Jung, *Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii's Interracial Labor Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

12. Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō*, 54–60. For Japanese immigrants as middleman-minorities, see Edna Bonacich and John Modell, *Economic Basis for Ethnic Solidarity: Small Business in the Japanese American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Bonacich, "A Theory of Middleman Minorities," *American Sociological Review* 38, no.5 (Oct., 1973): 583–94.

13. López, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," 103; Charles B. Spaulding, "The Mexican Strike at El Monte, California," *Sociology and Social Research* 18 (July–Aug., 1934): 571–72; Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (1998; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 75–76.

14. "Sweet, Sad Latino Life of Yesterday," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1992.

had declined due to the Depression.¹⁵ On June 1, communist organizers of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union (CAWIU)—whose strike committee included several Mexican, Japanese, and Filipino members—successfully mobilized about eight hundred Mexican farmworkers at a barrio called Hicks Camp in El Monte. The CAWIU began organizing migrant farmworkers in Imperial Valley during 1930 and then became the major force in thirty-seven strikes in California in 1933.¹⁶ Following its initial outbreak, the El Monte strike rapidly spread to other parts of the San Gabriel Valley and then into farther areas within Los Angeles County such as Venice because communist organizers of the CAWIU held local meetings and distributed leaflets to farmworkers right after the strike was set in motion. Women and children actively took part in picketing and distributing leaflets printed in Spanish, Japanese, and English. Learning from their failure in mobilizing farmworkers during a pea strike in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties in April, the organizers placed importance on the publication of leaflets for “ideological control” over farmworkers to lead a militant and successful strike.¹⁷

On June 6, *La Opinión* ran the first detailed account of the El Monte strike and reported that Japanese farmers had refused to improve labor conditions for the “numerous Mexicans [who] had three and four children to support.”¹⁸ Although CAWIU organizers first launched the strike, another

15. Mokichi Fukushima, secretary official in Tijuana, to Yasuya Uchida, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 11, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, Gaikoku ni okeru Rōdō Sōgi Kankei Zakken (Miscellaneous Documents Relating to Labor Disputes in Foreign Countries) (hereafter cited as I-4-4-0-2), vol. 1, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (DAMFAJ), Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan; Toshito Satō, consul in Los Angeles, to Uchida, June 17, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ. The Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR), a Japanese government's online database, makes publicly available a large number of historical documents preserved in the DAMFAJ. See <https://www.jacar.go.jp>, accessed February 4, 2019. I have used MeasuringWorth.com to convert the monetary value of the 1930s into that of 2018. See MeasuringWorth.com, online at <http://www.measuringworth.com>, accessed January 24, 2020. Although berries were picked on a crate basis like other crops, the payment for berry pickers was arranged on an hourly basis since they picked various types of berries with different crate values. See Ross H. Gast to George Pigeon Clements, manager of the Agricultural Department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, June 27, 1933, Box 64, George Pigeon Clements Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California (hereafter cited as Clements Papers).

16. “800 Pizcadores más Van a la Huelga,” *La Opinión*, June 6, 1933; López, “The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933,” 102–4; Spaulding, “The Mexican Strike at El Monte California,” 573.

17. “Kai! Shirane Shizuko Jō” (Good Job! Miss Shizuko Shirane), *Nichibei Shimbun*, June 9, 1933; López, “The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933,” 104; Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 143–46.

18. “800 Pizcadores más Van a la Huelga,” *La Opinión*, June 6, 1933.

Mexican workers' organization played an active role from the early stages of the strike. Calling itself la Unión de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (UCOM) by the end of the strike in early July, this union originated from la Confederación de Uniones Obreros Mexicanos (CUOM), which was founded in 1928 as a mutual aid society for Mexican workers in California. It emphasized patriotic principles rather than the international solidarity of workers. Armando Flores, a print shop owner and an original signer of the CUOM, as well as the general secretary of the UCOM in 1933, was especially active in leading those on strike. By June 6, with the support of Flores, the leaders of the ethnic Mexican community formed a pro-strike committee. They held a meeting at Flores's print shop and decided that the committee should not only support picketing by strikers, but also provide the government and workers in their home country with information of the strike. They also agreed to express their gratitude to *La Opinión* for "their dedicated and spontaneous support for the movement," which was not surprising since the newspaper catered to Mexican immigrant readers in Los Angeles.¹⁹ While most strike leaders were men like Flores, Mexican women were also actively supporting the strikers behind the scenes, cooking food and taking it to the strikers.²⁰

Following a request from Japanese farmers, more than ten local sheriffs began to protect their farms from the activities of labor organizers. Immigrant leaders such as Takashi Fukami, the general secretary of the Central Japanese Association of Southern California (*Nanka Chūō Nihonjin Kai*), quickly responded to the strike. Given the absence of the Mexican farmworkers, Japanese farmers tried to find more permanent replacement workers, while using their children to harvest the crop in the meantime. By June 10, Japanese farmers had advertised in local newspapers and distributed fliers

19. Ibid; "Arrestos al Cundir La Huelga de Los Pizcadores Mexicanos!," *La Opinión*, June 7, 1933; Weber, "The Organizing of Mexicano Agricultural Workers," 326–29. González, "The 1933 Los Angeles County Farm Workers Strike," 446. The UCOM and la Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (CUCOM) were not the same organization, since the latter was formally established on July 15, 1933, after the end of the El Monte strike. See Spaulding, "The Mexican Strike at El Monte, California," 575; González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 111. Moreover, in primary sources produced during the strike, the union led by Flores appears as the UCOM. See "Concluye La Huelga al Rendirse Los Japoneses," *La Opinión*, July 7, 1933; Copy of the contract between the Central Japanese Association of Southern California and la Unión de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (hereafter cited as contract), July 6, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.I, DAMFAJ. As for the founding of the CUOM, see Governor C. C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee, "Mexicans in California," October 1930, Box 62, Clements Papers.

20. "Sweet, Sad Latino Life of Yesterday," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1992.

to recruit new farmworkers. The *Rafu Shimpō* reported that many white Americans, responding to the call for work, “flooded to the Japanese association in El Monte and some brought their housewives, students, and children” and that they were not skilled workers, but “the most powerful weapon against the strike.” The ethnic newspaper covered the strike in a nationalistic tone with aggressive words such as “weapon,” “risk his life [to save fellow Japanese],” and “flames [of the strike].” In an interview article, an anonymous Japanese farmer explained his experience, saying, “It was like a war” when both strikers and sheriffs came to his farm. Resentment against Mexican strikers was evident from the Japanese side.²¹

Meanwhile, two young Japanese American representatives of the recently established San Gabriel Valley Japanese American Citizens League, Shizuko Shirane and David Shiratake, got the principal of El Monte Union High School to grant special permission to sixty-five Japanese students to work on the farms, additionally postponing the students’ exams until after the harvest. A *Rafu Shimpō* headline declared, “Good job! Miss Shizuko Shirane,” and noted “all the fellow farmers were moved by the beautiful action of the Nisei [second-generation].” By emphasizing the “beautiful” role of young Japanese Americans, the article romanticized their actions, at the expense of the Mexican farmworkers.²² For Japanese farmers, their U.S.-born children enabled them to lease land and provided them with useful temporary labor during an emergency.²³

El Monte’s white landowners association, headed by Tom Lambert, also backed the Japanese farmers who were their tenants. Lambert was concerned that the strike “would unquestionably be reflected directly back on the land owner” who knowingly let the Japanese lease lands under their children’s names, which was a legal loophole of the Alien Land Laws. He was “very much concerned about the suit brought by the Mexican strikers against Japanese vegetable growers by Flores,” which would question the legality of Japanese tenant agriculture. Although the strike caused serious concerns

21. “Fukami Kanji, Shi wo Toshite” (Secretary Fukami, Risking His Life), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 10, 1933; “Boshū ni Ōjite, Beikokujin ga Sattō” (Americans Flooded into the Office upon Recruitment), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 10, 1933; “Bokukokujin Higyo Taisaku de” (A Measure against the Mexican Strike), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 10, 1933; “Ichigo no Debana wo Orare, Tettei teki no Dageki desu” (They Spoiled the Harvest of Berries, Devastating Damage), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 11, 1933.

22. “Kai! Shirane Shizuko jō,” *Nichibei Shimbun*, June 9, 1933.

23. In the El Monte strike, the U.S.-born children of Japanese farmers played an important but secondary role. It was not until the late 1930s that the second-generation began to take a larger role in the Japanese farming community. See *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 58, 667.

among white landowners, posing the possibility of breaking down the tri-racial hierarchy in local agriculture, they continued to support Japanese farmers to protect their economic interests over the welfare of Mexican farmworkers.²⁴

The strike spread quickly to other areas such as Venice and Gardena, since Mexican farmworkers were working throughout the county.²⁵ In 1933, the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles estimated that there were 21,500 ethnic Mexican families in Los Angeles County and reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, “Even when there is a shortage of jobs in all branches, Mexicans always find jobs two or three days a week in harvesting fruits or vegetables.”²⁶ Given the large number of Mexican farmworkers, the El Monte strike became serious enough to involve both the Japanese and Mexican consulates in Los Angeles, as well as the state government and the business community of Southern California. In El Monte and other areas of Los Angeles County, strikers asked the Mexican consulate for support. Quickly responding to their request, the vice consul Ricardo Hill visited Venice on June 6 to take necessary steps to settle the problem under the auspices of the Department of Protection of the Mexican Consulate.²⁷ The Mexican consulate also supervised the flow of relief supplies for Mexican strikers. After launching the strike, the Mexican pro-strike committee assigned a member, Vicente Pinto, to collect provisions, funds, and any other assistance from people who wanted to help Mexican strikers in El Monte. Accordingly, an owner of a Mexican grocery store, M. Pacheco, was asked to provide strikers with “30 sacks of wheat, 8 sacks of beans, 200 pounds of salt, 500 pounds of sugar, 10 boxes of condensed milk, and 10 cans of butter that were

24. Gast to Clements, June 28, 1933; Clements to W. G. Arnoll, July 26, 1933, Box 64, Clements Papers; Wollenberg, “Race and Class in Rural California,” 161–63.

25. “Huelga de 125 Mexicanos Aquí,” *La Opinión*, June 4, 1933; “Bokukokujin Sutoraikai de Benisu Nōka no Taikai” (Farmers in Venice Hold a Convention as to the Strike of Mexicans), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 3, 1933; “Bōryoku sae Mochiite Higyo Sanka wo Kyōyō Suru, Gādena Heigen ni Bokujin Nashi” (Even with Violence, They Force People to Join the Strike, Mexicans Are Now Absent in the Gardena Valley), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 19, 1933; “Dominguez wo Osotta Ittai” (A Group That Attacked the Dominguez Area), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 11, 1933.

26. According to the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles, the number of Mexican families was 8,750 in Orange County, 3,750 in Ventura County, and 1,250 in San Luis Obispo County in 1933. See Luis Lupián G, “Informe de la Visita Practicada al Cosulado de México en Los Angeles, California, durante Los Días del 27 de Abril al 31 de Mayo de 1933,” June 6, 1933, Folder 266, Box 29, Collection Gaveta 30, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada (Genaro Estrada Historical Archive), Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Mexico City, Mexico (hereafter cited as AHGE).

27. “Huelga de 125 Mexicanos Aquí,” *La Opinión*, June 4, 1933; “Actua El Vice-Consul Ricardo Hill,” *La Opinión*, June 6, 1933.

worth 171.95 dollars.” The pro-strike committee estimated that these supplies could prolong the strike until almost the end of June and decided that these should be handed to strikers only through the order issued by the Mexican consulate. The Mexican consulate provided assistance to the strikers from the beginning because the El Monte strike appeared a chance to unite Mexican nationals in Los Angeles, some of whom were “forgetting the sentiment of solidarity, brotherhood, and patriotism that every Mexican should cherish for its fellow [Mexican] citizens,” as recorded in the consular monthly report.²⁸

On June 7, an official of the California Department of Industrial Relations met with Japanese consul Toshito Satō and told him that the wage of farm-workers was too low. Later that day, Hill visited Satō to ask him to “interpose their valuable influence before the group of Japanese farmers.” Hill had worked at the Mexican Legation in Tokyo from October 1923 to June 1924, which he might have told Satō at some point or another.²⁹ But Satō answered that there was little either consulate could do to settle the problem, given that Japanese farmers had already determined not to compromise.³⁰ The Japanese consulate assumed a hands-off approach to the conflict in its early stage, standing by the side of farmers. In Japanese diplomatic correspondence, Satō later explained to Tokyo that he had refrained from intervening in the strike “because of the character of the conflict.” Although Satō did not specify the meaning of its “character,” he considered that the consulate “should not deal with it directly but support them [Japanese farmers] indirectly,” probably because he thought that the consulate’s intervention in the early stage could promote the internationalization of this local interethnic conflict.³¹

Satō became the consul in 1929 after working in the Japanese Embassy in Washington for more than three years. Japanese immigrants later remembered him as one of the consuls who worked most closely with their ethnic community in Los Angeles prior to World War II. Satō had to handle the U.S.-Japan relations carefully, due to the international tension heightened by Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and due to Japanese dependence on U.S. exports such as oil and cotton, many of them produced in or near the

28. The Mexican consulate in Los Angeles, “Informe de protección. Junio de 1933,” June 1933, Folder 2, Box 626, Collection Departamento Consular (IV), AHGE.

29. Ibid; “Benisu Higyo ni Kanshite, Hiru Ryōji wa Kataru” (Consul Hill Talks about the Venice Strike), *Rafu Shimpō*, May 7, 1936.

30. “Nōen Sutoraiki de Nichi-Boku Ryōjikan no Sesshō” (Negotiation between the Japanese and Mexican Consulates Regarding the Agricultural Strike), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 8, 1933.

31. Satō to Uchida, July 18, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.I, DAMFAJ.

Los Angeles area.³² Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles fervently supported Japan's foreign policy in Manchuria, since "[p]atriotic identification with Japan was a way by which the Issei [first-generation immigrants] psychologically turned away from the America that had rejected them," as historian Yuji Ichioka argues.³³ Even though the peak of pre-war anti-Japanese sentiment came with U.S. exclusion of Japanese immigration in 1924, Japanese communities continued to face nativist harassment and local conflicts always had the potential of hurting U.S.-Japan relations. To maintain stable diplomatic and trade relations between Japan and the United States, Satō directed Japanese immigrants to abide by U.S. laws and settle in U.S. society without causing any problems.³⁴

In contrast, the Mexican consulate played an active role in the El Monte strike from its beginning. Despite the initial success of CAWIU organizers in mobilizing strikers, their presence ironically gave a good reason for the Mexican consulate to take over leadership of the strike by using anti-communist rhetoric and emphasizing Mexican nationalism. When mass picket lines set up by the CAWIU organizers resulted in a confrontation with sheriffs in El Monte, the Mexican consul Alejandro Martínez came to El Monte at the request of Flores and denounced the CAWIU organizers as "reds" who did not represent the rights of farmworkers. Flores most likely wanted to undermine the CAWIU leadership with the help of the Mexican consulate. On June 10, when local authorities finally arrested and jailed eight of the CAWIU organizers involved in the El Monte strike, Martínez appeared in public and denounced the CAWIU leadership again. After this incident, strikers began to fight against Japanese farmers along nationalistic lines.³⁵

32. "Satō Ryōji no Raichaku" (The Arrival of Consul Satō), *Rafu Shimpō*, November 5, 1929; *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 378–79; Yoshiaki Katada, "1930 Nendai ni Itaru Nichi-Bei Kankei no Gaiyō: Beikoku Taiheiyo Gan Shuyōkō Toriatsukai Kamotsu to Bōeki Kōro no Kōsatsu wo Tōshite" (An Exploration of the United States–Japanese Trade Relationships during the Period Approaching the 1930s: An Examination of the Changes of Exports and Imports in Major Ports along the US Pacific Coast and Shipping Routes between the US and Japan), *NUCB Journal of Economics and Information Science* 58, no.2 (Mar. 2014): 107–8.

33. *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 668; Yuji Ichioka, *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History*, eds. Gordon H. Chang and Eiichiro Azuma (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 199.

34. "Seikatsu Kaizen to Hōritsu Sonchō wo" (Improvement of Life and Respect for Laws), *Rafu Shimpō*, January 1, 1931. As for the conflict between proponents and opponents of anti-Japanese movement from 1924 to 1941, see Lon Kurashige, *Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold History of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 139–69.

35. López, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," 105.

It was not difficult for them to switch their leadership from communists to the Mexican consulate, since few strikers were actual members of the CAWIU, and non-communist leaders like Flores gained confidence in directing the course of the strike.³⁶

Predictably, the Japanese farmers welcomed the arrest of communist organizers due to the threat they posed to their business. When local authorities arrested a Japanese communist named Hiroshi Tōi and a group of Mexican workers on June 7, the ethnic Japanese newspaper *Nichibei Shimbun* praised the action.³⁷ Although prominent Japanese American communists such as Karl Yoneda played an important role in building a multiracial and multi-ethnic coalition, Japanese immigrant farmers and the *Rafu Shimpō* regarded communism as a threat to their ethnic solidarity and to farmers' profits.³⁸ One Japanese farmer maintained that "the strike spread widely because of the agitation of leftists and lazy unemployed people" and that farmers could solve the conflict "by separating professional agitators from workers and negotiating directly with workers."³⁹ The Japanese consul Satō also emphasized, "if individuals such as communists are disturbing Japanese farmers, it is my thought that we should take an appropriate action in cooperation with authorities."⁴⁰ In the El Monte strike, both Japanese and Mexican leaders regarded communist organizers as harmful to their respective economic and political solidarity.

Meanwhile, Flores was active in making the Japanese-Mexican conflict an international problem. He asked for support from U.S. and Mexican politicians such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the former president of Mexico, Plutarco Elías Calles. Calles, known as the "Jefe Máximo [supreme leader]," maintained strong political power in Mexico. By June 23, Calles had donated at least \$750 (approximately \$14,500 in 2018) through the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles, while Mexican President Abelardo Rodríguez, loyal to Calles, donated \$1,000 for strikers.⁴¹ Given the reality of the

36. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 147.

37. "Kai! Shirane Shizuko Jō," *Nichibei Shimbun*, June 9, 1933.

38. For Karl Yoneda, see Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 191.

39. "Shitsugyōsha to Sakeibunshi, Higyō Kakudai no Gen'in" (The Unemployed and Leftists, the Reason behind the Expansion of the Strike), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 11, 1933.

40. "Kanken to Teikei Shi Sakeibunshi wa Issō Suru Hōshin" (In Cooperation with Authorities, Leftists Should Be Removed), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 10, 1933.

41. Satō to Uchida, June 23, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. I, DAMFAJ; "Calles Envía Dinero a los Huelguistas," *La Opinión*, June 21, 1933; López, "The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," 106; Ricardo Pozas, "El Maximato: El Partido del Hombre Fuerte, 1929-1934," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México* 9 (1983): 251-79; The Mexican consulate in Los Angeles, "Informe de

transborder migration of Mexican farmworkers in the early twentieth century, Calles found in the El Monte strike an opportunity to forge a positive image of himself among the Mexican working class beyond the U.S.-Mexico border. Historian Ronald W. López contends that “[t]his would be an opportunity for Calles to get good publicity and simultaneously Flores would be getting support for the strike” since “labor groups in Mexico were disenchanting with Calles and his puppet president, Abelardo Rodríguez.” Gilbert G. González also argues that “Calles had no deep interest in the strike other than his own driving political ambition.”⁴² At the same time, problems were beginning to mount not only for Japanese immigrants, but also for their country’s diplomats in Japan, Mexico, and the United States.

The expansion of the strike along with the active intervention of the Mexican consulate and political leaders persuaded Satō to change his hands-off approach and intervene in the conflict in order to prevent the souring of relations between Japan, the United States, and Mexico. On June 23, Satō sent a telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yasuya Uchida, in Tokyo, writing that the strike was “considerably organized” and that he had been working hard to solve the conflict with Japanese farmers and local business leaders of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. Satō explained that the U.S. economy depended on Mexican farmworkers because of the “historical relationship between the United States and Mexico” after the U.S. government banned Japanese immigration in 1924. Satō reported to Tokyo that the number of Mexican strikers in the San Gabriel Valley had increased to two thousand and strike leaders were working with the Mexican government and planning for a boycott against Japanese merchants.⁴³

While the strike involved Mexican farmworkers, Japanese farmers, and their respective consulates, white business leaders in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce also got involved and sought to convince Japanese farmers and Mexican farmworkers to resolve the strike through a compromise. They too were concerned that the strike by farmworkers would reinforce anti-immigration sentiment and rekindle the argument for Mexican immigration restriction, which could lead to a labor shortage.⁴⁴ When the Los Angeles

protección. Junio de 1933,” June 1933, Folder 2, Box 626, Collection Departamento Consular (IV), AHGE.

42. López, “The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933,” 106; González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 113.

43. Satō to Uchida, June 23, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.1, DAMFAJ.

44. Gast to Clements, June 27, 1933, Box 64, Clements Papers.

County government repatriated a large number of Mexicans in 1931 due to the Great Depression, some chamber members expressed their concerns that the repatriation program could severely damage local industries. In May of that year, Chamber President J. A. H. Kerr stated, “[W]e regret that a considerable number of our Mexican people are returning to their home land” and “all those who have come into this country legally not only are permitted to stay here but are welcome.”⁴⁵ To prevent a labor shortage, on June 26 of 1933, the Chamber of Commerce leaders proposed a compromise and called on the U.S. Labor Department to mediate a settlement. The proposal demanded that the Japanese farmers pay eighteen cents an hour to berry pickers. Japanese tenant farmers agreed to the deal, but Mexican farmworkers declined it, demanding an arrangement that covered all vegetables and fruits as well as berries.⁴⁶ Ross H. Gast, the Chamber’s official who arranged the first round of negotiations, had increasing concerns about the precarious situation of the strike. One day after the first negotiation ended in failure, Gast sent a letter to his superior George Pigeon Clements, the manager of the Chamber’s Agricultural Department, writing, “[M]y opinion is that unless something is done, this local situation is dangerous in that it will spread throughout the state as a whole. In my opinion this is the most serious break of the Mexican workers here.”⁴⁷ Reflecting his concern, by this time, the total number of strikers had reached over five thousand in Los Angeles and Orange Counties.⁴⁸

Gast correctly grasped the potential of the strike to spread far beyond the Los Angeles area, drawing the larger involvement of the California state government. Furthermore, the failure to reach an agreement exacerbated the situation not only in Los Angeles but also in Mexicali, home to the largest concentration of ethnic Japanese residents in Baja California, Mexico. Anti-Japanese sentiment in Los Angeles travelled across the U.S.-Mexico border

45. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 22-23; J. A. H. Kerr, “To Our Mexican Friends,” *Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Bulletin*, May 1931, Box 80, Clements Papers.

46. Satō to Uchida, July 1 and 18, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.I, DAMFAJ. While López and González explain that Japanese tenant farmers agreed to pay twenty cents an hour on June 26, a Japanese diplomatic document says that they agreed to pay eighteen cents an hour. The Japanese side most likely took into consideration both skilled and less-skilled workers and calculated average hourly wages of piecework and overtime work. See López, “The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933,” 107-8; González, “The 1933 Los Angeles county farm workers strike,” 452; Gast to Clements, June 27, 1933, Box 64, Clements Papers.

47. Gast to Clements, June 27, 1933, Box 64, Clements Papers.

48. López, “The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933,” 107-8.

and began to disturb ethnic Japanese residents in Mexicali, who played an important role in the local cotton agriculture. Consequently, Japanese diplomats in Mexico became increasingly concerned about the impact of the El Monte strike on Japan-Mexico relations.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS

After the failure to reach a compromise on June 26, the Japanese consul Satō became increasingly concerned over the strike's negative impact on international relations involving Japan, Mexico, and the United States and discarded his early uncritical stance toward Japanese farmers. By monitoring *La Opinión*, he was already aware of the exacerbating situation in Mexico as the most influential Mexican leaders such as Calles and Rodríguez were supporting the strikers. In addition, two days before the failed negotiation, the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Japanese Legation in Mexico, Yoshiatsu Hori, warned Satō of the possibility that the strike would bother the Mexican government by driving a large number of unemployed immigrants in Los Angeles back to Mexico. Hori added, "I hope that you take our region's situation into consideration, although I understand that you are working hard to solve the problem in an amicable way."⁴⁹

On June 27, Satō summoned thirty-five leaders of Japanese farm communities in Los Angeles and Orange County to his consulate building and recommended that they reach a compromise with Mexican farmworkers. By this time, he came to consider that without his intervention, the strike "could complicate the relations of Japan, the United States, and Mexico." At the meeting, Satō stated to Japanese farmers, "it would be wise for the Japanese side to make a concession at necessary costs," and attempted to persuade them to pay twenty cents an hour since the strike had become "increasingly important locally as well as internationally." The El Monte strike could stir up anti-Japanese sentiment, which had troubled U.S.-Japan relations since the early twentieth century, as seen in the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 and 1908, the first California Alien Land Law of 1913, the second California Alien Land Law of 1920, and the Immigration Act of 1924 that altogether prohibited Japanese immigration. Satō was concerned that mounting anti-Japanese sentiment caused by the strike would lead to

49. Satō to Uchida, June 23, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.1, DAMFAJ; Yoshiatsu Hori, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Japanese Legation in Mexico, to Satō, June 24, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

further legal restrictions against Japanese land use, which would go beyond the restrictions laid out in the Alien Land Laws.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Japanese farmers rejected the consul's recommendation, explaining that it was hardly possible for them to raise wages due to the continuing economic recession and that some farmers had difficulty paying their land rent and water bills. They concluded, "Even with the current wages, fifteen cents per hour, Japanese farmers get into the red. So it is impossible for us to raise wages until the economy gets well."⁵¹ Although Japanese agriculture in Los Angeles County had continued to develop by overcoming legal restrictions on land use, farmers' average income was much below that of all residents in California, even though many Japanese women and children were supporting family farming through unpaid labor.⁵² In addition, Japanese farmers were reluctant to make a concession because 60 to 70 percent of the struggling Mexican strikers had already returned to work by the beginning of July. The strike did not seem to be working.⁵³ Despite the ongoing internationalization of the strike, the fact that Japanese tenant farmers had sufficient political autonomy to reject the consul's recommendation further complicated the situation. What was evident was that the Japanese consulate began to work closely with farmers as the Mexican counterpart had been doing with strikers, which only made clear the Japanese-Mexican divide.

In attempting to resolve the strike, two *Rafu Shimpō* reporters visited the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles and interviewed the consul Martínez, vice consul Hill, the strike leader Flores, and their lawyer David Marcus about the ongoing Japanese-Mexican conflict. On June 29, their conversation appeared in the *Rafu Shimpō*. Martínez simply reaffirmed their basic stance in the strike saying, "It is my viewpoint that the Mexicans are entitled to better wages. It is also my hope that the Japanese producers may find a way to cooperate in our efforts to help the Mexican families of California as I consider that both factors have [been] a great force for the development of the State of California." In this meeting, the Japanese reporters were particularly eager to interview Flores, regarding him as "the most influential person

50. Satō to Uchida, July 1 and 18, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

51. Ibid: "Kore Ijō no Chingin Neage wa Nihonjin Nōka no Jimetsu" (Raising Wages Will Lead the Self-Destruction of Japanese Farmers), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 28, 1933.

52. Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō*, 51–58. In 1941, the per capita income for all Japanese Americans was \$671, while the per capita income for all California civilians was \$982. See Leonard Broom and Ruth Riemer, *Removal and Return: The Socio-Economic Effects of the War on Japanese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1949), 13, 20–22.

53. Satō to Uchida, July 1, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

among Mexicans.” Flores told the reporters, “What we want the Japanese farmers to understand is that we are not making an inadequate claim.” He added, “It is my sincere hope that we concede each other to reach a peaceful solution. Otherwise, we need to take a different measure.” When the reporters asked what he meant by a “different measure,” Flores answered, “I can’t tell you clearly since it depends on the situation.”⁵⁴ Flores did not seem to have a definite idea of a different measure, and so this interview proved that the situation was quite uncertain.

The Mexican consulate responded to this worsening situation. On June 30, Mexican consul Martínez exchanged telegrams with the governor of California James Rolph Jr., asking him to intervene in the dispute. In their communication, Martínez forwarded a telegram sent by former president Calles describing Mexicans’ working conditions as “intolerable” and their wages as “inhumanly low.” Rolph ordered the director of the Department of Industrial Relations and the chief of the division of Labor Statistics and Law Enforcement to “amicably adjust the dispute.” The next day, Rolph’s decision headlined *La Opinión*’s front page, which generally buried local news in other sections.⁵⁵ According to the monthly consular report of June 1933 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, the Mexican consulate also called Rolph’s attention to “the illegal intervention of the police authorities of Arcadia and San Gabriel and other parts affected by the strike” because “it is known based on a reliable source that Japanese farmers have paid police officers in the already mentioned areas.”⁵⁶

The strike leader Flores played an important behind-the-scenes role. Following the failed negotiation, Flores left Los Angeles for Baja California to meet Calles, who had been supporting the strikers. On his way to El Sauzal in Baja California where he would meet Calles, Flores told *La Opinión*, “Our principal objective is to personally show gratitude to Mr. General Calles for his moral and material support” and to relay the details of the fight against the Japanese. On June 29, just a day after Flores met Calles, Calles sent a message to Governor Rolph, explaining, “the Japanese employers . . . lack

54. “Jitai wo Akka Seru Higyō to Bokujin Gawa Shunōbu no Iken” (The Strike That Exacerbates the Situation and the Opinions of Mexican Leaders), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 29, 1933; “Local Mexican Leaders Voice Opinions to the Rafu Shimpō; Consul Martínez Issues Statement Pleading for Amity,” *Rafu Shimpō* (English edition), June 29, 1933.

55. “Action to End Strike Begun,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1933; “El Gobernador de California Intervino Ya en La Huelga,” *La Opinión*, July 1, 1933.

56. The Mexican consulate in Los Angeles, “Informe de protección. Junio de 1933,” June 1933, Folder 2, Box 626, Collection Departamento Consular (IV), AHGE.

all humanitarian sentiment and deny workers the rights they have in the modern world.” This message appeared in *La Opinión* the next day.⁵⁷ Both Martínez and Flores needed the political power of the former Mexican president to support the strikers.

On the other hand, Japanese consul Satō was paying careful attention to the actions of the Mexican consulate. Satō reported to Tokyo, “the Mexican consul openly supports the strikers as he kept the funds for the strike and distributed fliers to encourage the strike while asking the U.S. Labor Department and the Governor of California to intervene.” Actually, Satō speculated that Flores was Calles’s right-hand man and that Flores was manipulating the Mexican consulate as his *tesaki* (puppet) by using the power of Calles. Satō developed a sense of distrust toward Mexican strikers and their consulate, leaving no room to problematize the dominant structure of Los Angeles agriculture that marginalized both the Japanese and Mexicans. Instead, the Japanese consul functioned to affirm the status quo by cooperating with the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce that represented the interests of white landowners.⁵⁸

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce proved far more sympathetic to the Japanese. Ross H. Gast believed the strike leaders were exploiting the workers by preventing them from working. He regarded Flores as “a pretty smart operator” who “was able to point out that if the Mexican government and particularly Calles and Rodríguez would show sympathy” to Mexican farmworkers in Southern California, they would gain the support of labor in Mexico. In addition, Gast thought that it was necessary to take a “humanitarian standpoint” to solve the strike because “workers want to go back to the fields” free from the exploitation by strike leaders. He clearly lacked a humanitarian viewpoint to understand the farmworkers’ plight, although he was partly right in the sense that the Mexican government had a political stake in the strike. First, it was understandable why the strike leaders rejected the compromise offered by Japanese farmers. The proposal covered only the berry industry despite the fact that Mexican farmworkers worked a variety of fruit and vegetable crops on a number of farms throughout Los Angeles, just like those harvesting celery in Venice. Second, and more importantly, the wages of farmworkers were extremely low, compared

57. “Dan Nuevo Impulso al Movimiento,” *La Opinión*, June 28, 1933; “El Movimiento está Tomando Proporciones Serias, Dijo el Cónsul Martínez,” *La Opinión*, June 30, 1933.

58. Satō to Uchida, June 23, July 1 and 18, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

to the state's minimum wages for industrial workers, thirty-three cents an hour, which did not apply to farmworkers.⁵⁹

By this time, the El Monte strike had taken a transnational twist when anti-Japanese sentiment spread beyond the small town of El Monte and unexpectedly developed in Mexico. In mid-June, anti-Japanese activities in Mexico prompted a call for a boycott against Japanese merchants to protest the actions of Japanese farmers in Los Angeles. Anti-Japanese sentiment grew stronger in Mexico after Calles took an unfavorable attitude toward Japanese farmers and provided financial support for Mexican strikers in Los Angeles.⁶⁰ Calles helped transform the strike into an international problem by providing support from Mexico and mobilizing the Mexican public. He also sent messages to California's Governor Rolph, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the chairman of the leading Mexican political party, the National Revolutionary Party, to urge their support. The Japanese minister plenipotentiary in Mexico, Hori, sent a telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uchida, in Tokyo on June 29, warning that since local newspapers widely reported the action taken by Calles, the situation of the Japanese side was "seriously deteriorating" in Mexico, so much so that it might have a negative effect on Japan-Mexico relations.⁶¹

Even before the strike began, Hori was aware of growing anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexico, especially in its northern region including Baja California, due to the territorial expansion of the Japanese empire in Manchuria. In May 1933, the Mexican newspaper *El Excelsior* ran an anti-Japanese article warning of a possible Japanese invasion of Mexico with the large headline "A grave danger to Baja California," which Hori countered. Frustrated with the prolonged strike in Los Angeles and the worsening situation in Mexico, Hori sent another telegram to Uchida in Tokyo the next day. He insisted, "I had been dealing with this problem as a local problem of California that had nothing to do with us, but I would need to explain the position of Japanese tenant farmers [of Los Angeles] depending on the future situation. Thus,

59. Gast to Clements, June 27, 1933, Box 64, Clements Papers; The State of California, Department of Industrial Relations, "History of California Minimum Wage," online at <http://www.dir.ca.gov/iwc/minimumwagehistory.htm>, accessed December 29, 2018. On farmworker wages and expenses, see Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (1939; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 246–47.

60. Hori to Uchida, June 15, 1933; Fukushima to Uchida, July 11, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

61. Hori to Uchida, June 29, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ; "Así Lo Anunció Anoche el Consulado, y el Comité Abrió una Investigación," *La Opinión*, June 30, 1933.

I beg you to send us a telegram *immediately* about the points of contention over wages claimed by both sides of the conflict, the number of Mexican workers who are returning to work, and the latest situation of the conflict” [italics added].⁶²

Japanese diplomats in Mexico also needed to prevent anti-Japanese sentiment from spreading and turning into some organized campaign against Japanese immigrants. Although their small population did not pose a significant economic threat to ordinary Mexicans, the Japanese had occasionally been the victims of xenophobic violence in Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution, they did not experience racial animosity in the way the Chinese did, as seen in the massacre of 303 Chinese in Torreón, Coahuila, in 1911.⁶³ However, according to the Japanese government’s investigation, at least fifty-one Japanese suffered physical and economic damage during the revolution. Most cases were robbery, but some Japanese lost their lives. For example, in October of 1913 in Nayarit, revolutionary soldiers robbed the grocery store of Kenjirō Sakaguchi and set his store on fire destroying his entire fortune valued at 5,000 pesos. In March of 1918 in the same area, soldiers robbed a grocery store and killed a Japanese shopkeeper, Ryūsaku Kikuchi.⁶⁴ In the 1930s, the Great Depression made the Japanese in Mexico increasingly concerned about anti-Japanese sentiment, as it created a large number of frustrated, unemployed Mexicans. In September of 1932 in Veracruz, for instance, a group of unemployed Mexicans demanded that seventeen Japanese shop owners hire Mexicans. After the Japanese rejected their request,

62. Hori to Uchida, June 30, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ; “Un Grave Peligro para la Baja California,” *El Excelsior*, May 9, 1933; Jerry García, *Looking Like the Enemy: Japanese Mexicans, the Mexican State, and US Hegemony, 1897–1945* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 93.

63. Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi Henshū Inkaï (Editorial Committee for the History of Japan-Mexico Interaction), ed., *Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi* (History of Japan-Mexico Interaction) (Tokyo, 1990), 479–80 (hereafter cited as *Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi*); García, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 61–62. In Torreón in the state of Coahuila, Mexican revolutionary supporters killed 303 Chinese. Grace Peña Delgado contends that the Mexican mob also killed five Japanese in the massacre, but a Japanese diplomatic document contradicts her explanation. In May of 1911, Kumaichi Horiguchi, a Japanese diplomat stationed in Mexico City, reported that the mob killed no Japanese in Torreón based on their investigation. *Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi*, a comprehensive history of Japanese immigrants in Mexico, writes that the murder of Japanese in Torreón was false information. See Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 104–5; Kumaichi Horiguchi to Jutarō Komura, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 26, 1911, 5-3-2-0-154, Bokukoku Nairan Kankei Teikoku Shinmin no Songai Baishō Ikken (Demand for Compensation for Damage of Japanese Subjects Related to Mexican Civil War) (hereafter cited as 5-3-2-0-154), vol. 1, DAMFAJ; *Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi*, 365–67.

64. Keiichi Itō, acting deputy minister of the Japanese Legation in Mexico, to Uchida, June 1, 1922, 5-3-2-0-154, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

they forced the closure of two Japanese shops, denouncing the Japanese as foreigners exploiting Mexicans.⁶⁵

The El Monte strike took place in this historical context of anti-Japanese violence and became another source that fueled anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexico. The strike's impact was serious among Japanese residents in Mexico, especially in the Mexican border city of Mexicali, Baja California, about ninety miles east of San Diego and just across the border from California's Imperial County. The Mexicali Japanese community began to develop in the 1910s in a close relationship with their fellow compatriots in the United States. Many early Japanese immigrants in Mexicali came from California in hopes of building a better life in a land free of exclusionist laws, such as the Alien Land Laws. There were also Japanese immigrants who attempted to enter the United States clandestinely from Mexico but decided to settle in Mexicali. They remained in Mexicali because as World War I boosted the local economy, Japanese immigrants found an economic opportunity in speculative cotton agriculture of the region. California Japanese invested in the industry, while local Japanese immigrants in Mexicali provided cheap and reliable labor. After getting used to their new life in Mexicali, Japanese farmworkers began to work as foremen and later tenant farmers. They leased lands from an American company called the Colorado River Land Company that monopolized the local agribusiness of Mexicali, while employing Mexican workers for the harvest. In 1917, they founded the Japanese Association of Mexicali to strengthen ethnic solidarity to survive the Mexican dominant society. They became a middleman-minority in Mexicali like their co-ethnics in Los Angeles.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 affected the increase of Japanese in Mexicali, since it nullified the Gentlemen's Agreement that had required the Japanese government to refrain from sending its subjects to Mexico in order to prevent illegal immigration into the United States. The nullification of the agreement made it easier for the Japanese government to issue passports to those desiring to go to Mexico, particularly *yobiyose* immigrants (relatives of Japanese residents in Mexico).⁶⁷ As a result,

65. *Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi*, 478–81.

66. *Ibid.*, 422–24, 438–39, 516; Nihonjin Mekishiko Ijūshi Hensan Inkaï (Editorial Committee for the Japanese Migration History in Mexico), ed., *Nihonjin Mekishiko Ijūshi* (Japanese Migration History in Mexico) (1971), 200–6 (hereafter cited as *Nihonjin Mekishiko Ijūshi*); Catalina Velázquez Morales, *Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920–1937* (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2001), 49–51.

67. Tokunaga, “Hainichi Iminhō to Zai Mekishiko Nihonjin: Beiboku Kokkyō Chiiki ni okeru Nihonjin Imin Shakaiken no Hatten,” 68.

most Japanese who arrived at Mexico after 1924 were yobiyose. María Elena Ota Mishima demonstrates that 2,950 Japanese immigrated to Mexico from 1921 to 1941 and that 74 percent of them did so from 1925 to 1932 mostly as yobiyose.⁶⁸ In 1933, the total Japanese population in Mexico was 5,297 according to a Japanese government report.⁶⁹

As Japanese immigrants brought their relatives across the Pacific Ocean and their population increased, Mexicali developed as an ethnic enclave with Japanese shops and restaurants. Furthermore, exclusion from the United States made Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles interested in migrating to Mexico, although it did not result in a large-scale migration, strengthening their ties with Japanese farmers in Baja California.⁷⁰ By the 1930s Mexicali became a large concentration of ethnic Japanese residents in Mexico with nearly 1,000 people.⁷¹ Ensenada, another Mexican city in Baja California, also attracted Japanese, many of whom were fishermen working for Japanese fishery companies based in Southern California. In 1930, about 250 Japanese lived in Ensenada, although many of them were out of town working on the

68. María Elena Ota Mishima, *Siete Migraciones Japonesas en México, 1890–1978* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios de Asia y Africa, 1985), 67.

69. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “The Situation of Overseas Japanese in Central and South America,” 1934, GiAM-3, Dai 67 Kai Teikoku Gikai Setsumeji Sankō Shiryō Jō-kan (Explanatory Report Prepared for the 67th Imperial Diet, vol.1), DAMFAJ. García writes that the total Japanese population in Mexico was estimated to be 5,967 in 1930. See García, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 79.

70. *Nihonjin Mekishikō Ijūshi*, 206; Shirō Fujioka, *Ayumi no Ato: Hokubei Tairiku Nihonjin Kaitaku Monogatari* (Traces of a Journey: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in the North American Continent) (Los Angeles: Ayumi no Ato Kankō Kōenkai, 1957), 72–74; María Elena Ota Mishima has found that out of 3,626 Japanese who immigrated to Mexico between 1890 and 1949, fifteen Japanese immigrants resettled from the United States and 95 percent of them came from Japan. There were Japanese immigrants who first landed and moved through the U.S. territory and soon later entered Mexico via Mexicali and Tijuana. See María Elena Ota Mishima, “Características Sociales y Económicas de Los Migrantes Japoneses en México,” in *Destino México: Un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. María Elena Ota Mishima (Mexico City: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios de Asia y Africa, 1997), 55–57, 60–63, 104–10; Yasutarō Taki, *Mekishikō Kokujo Taikan: Shokumin Shichijūnenishi* (Mexico, Great Friend of Japan: A Seventy-Year History of Japanese Settlement) (Mexico City: Mehiko Shimpōsha, 1968), 274–75.

71. Japanese Association of Mexicali to Ken Yanagisawa, acting deputy minister of the Japanese Legation in Mexico, June 13, 1931, M-1-3-0-1_1, Zaigai Teikoku Kōkan Kankei Zakken/Setchi Kankei (Miscellaneous Documents Relating to Overseas Imperial Diplomatic Offices/Relating to Establishment), vol. 1, DAMFAJ; Yanagisawa to Kijūrō Shidehara, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 29, 1931, M-2-2-0-1_3_2, Honshō Narabini Zaigai Kōkan'in Shutchō Kankei Zakken/Honshōin Oyobi Zaigai Kōkan'in Kaigai Shutchō no Bu/Zaibei Kakukan (Miscellaneous Documents Relating to Overseas Diplomatic Offices/Overseas Assignments of Ministry Officials and Diplomatic Office Staff Members/Offices in the United States), vol. 2, DAMFAJ.

voyage.⁷² On the other hand, Tijuana did not have significant industries such as cotton agriculture and fishing, thus it did not draw as many Japanese immigrants as Mexicali and Ensenada did. While the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is an important historical site of Mexican migration, particularly the development of an ethnic Japanese community in Mexicali reveals to us an understudied history of Japanese migration along the borderlands.

Despite their economic, cultural, and political ties with Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles, the Japanese in Mexicali initially did not take sides in El Monte strike. Nevertheless, they were facing anti-Japanese sentiment that developed in El Monte and spread beyond the U.S.-Mexico border.⁷³ According to the report of Mokichi Fukushima, a Japanese diplomat stationed in Tijuana, “Mexicans here [in Mexicali] who had been relatively cool began to launch the activity to collect donations as well as the boycott against Japanese merchants as an act of revenge,” because Calles intervened in the conflict. The Mexicali Japanese became increasingly concerned about Calles and the impact of anti-Japanese sentiment on their cotton farming. Japanese cotton farmers employed Mexican farmworkers on favorable terms granted by the local government of Baja California. They, however, became fearful that mounting anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexicali could motivate the governor of Baja California, Agustín Olachea, to end that accommodation for Japanese cotton farmers. On the day after the failed negotiation in Los Angeles, the Mexicali Japanese finally decided to publicly express their support for Mexican strikers, rather than for fellow Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles, as an attempt to deflect any anti-Japanese sentiment. This decision was especially difficult because the Mexicali Japanese had received financial support from the Los Angeles Japanese when they suffered a poor cotton harvest in the previous year. In their public statement, they noted the bonds between Japanese on both sides of the border, but clearly sided with the Mexican strikers: “[T]he members of the Japanese Association of [Mexicali], Mexico, putting aside the spiritual and racial bonds that unite us with such Japanese residents in California, U.S.A, for humanitarian reasons, for moral reasons,

72. Ota Mishima, *Siete Migraciones Japonesas en México, 1890–1978*, 88–92; *Nichi-Boku Kōryūshi*, 428–37; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, May 1932, Tsū-San_97, Bokukoku “Ensenada” Hōmen ni okeru Honpōjin no Hatten Jōkyō/1932 Nen (Development Circumstances of Japanese in the Ensenada Area, Mexico/1932), DAMFAJ.

73. Even before the El Monte strike, anti-Japanese sentiment was increasing in the northern regions of Mexico such as Baja California due to Japanese expansion in Asia. See García, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 93.

and for the directions of conscience and of rights, we unite for very righteous protests of Mexicans against the unfair conduct of those subjects of the Japanese Empire.”⁷⁴ Transborder anti-Japanese sentiment seemed to have resulted in the cooperation of Mexicali Japanese, if only temporarily, for the Mexican nationalist pro-strike campaign.

The Mexicali Japanese sent their pro-strike statement to Calles, Olachea, and the media on June 27. Three days later, *La Opinión* published it in Los Angeles. The Mexicali Japanese even donated \$500 (approximately \$9,690 in 2018) for strikers to quell anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexico more effectively. Fukushima later reported to Tokyo that Japanese residents published the pro-strike statement and made donations under the pressure from a local Mexican lawyer called Edmundo Guajardo. After Calles demonstrated his support for Mexican strikers in Los Angeles, Guajardo organized an anti-Japanese donation committee calling local Mexicali leaders for support in fundraising and a boycott in Mexicali. According to Fukushima, on June 27, a Mexican merchant suspended his business with Japanese merchants in concert with the anti-Japanese campaign in Mexicali.⁷⁵ Throughout the strike in Los Angeles and its unexpected repercussion in Mexicali, Fukushima stayed well informed by Japanese immigrants in Mexicali and maintained a sympathetic attitude toward them. This close relationship was partly because Japanese immigrants in Mexico were loyal to the Japanese government that provided protection, knowing that Chinese immigrants had suffered harsh discrimination because they lacked the Chinese government’s protection in Mexico.⁷⁶

On the other hand, some Mexicans criticized the anti-Japanese campaigns. Before the publication of the pro-strike statement, a newspaper circulated in

74. Fukushima to Uchida, July 11, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ; “Mensajes de Los Japoneses de Baja California, Apoyando La Huelga de Los Pizzadores,” *La Opinión*, June 30, 1933. The statement was published in Spanish: “los miembros de esta Asociación Japonesa de la Baja California, México, haciendo a un lado los lazos espirituales y de raza que nos ligan con dichos japoneses residentes en California, E. U. A., por humanidad, por moral y por los dictados de la conciencia y del derecho, nos aunamos a las muy justas protestas de los mexicanos en contra del inicuo proceder de aquellos súbditos del imperio japonés.”

75. Fukushima to Uchida, June 28 and 29, and July 11, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ. In late July of 1933, Guajardo acknowledged the fact that the Mexicali Japanese made the donation when he was interviewed by a local Mexicali newspaper *Mercurio*. See “Mandaron Dinero Los Japoneses?,” *Mercurio*, July 29, 1933, Miscellaneous Newspaper, Collection, 1704–1970, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, Calif. (hereafter as Miscellaneous Newspaper Collection).

76. García, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 89.

Tijuana, *El Hispano-Americano*, ran an editorial questioning the anti-Japanese boycott in Mexico. It wrote, “What responsibility corresponds to the Japanese rooted in Mexico, who had nothing in common with the Japanese farmers of California other than their nationality and had not intervened in the conflict between Mexican pickers and *patrones amarillos* [yellow employers] in the said state?” Anti-Japanese sentiment was not strong in Tijuana, presumably because the city lacked much of a Japanese population. This editorial did little to decrease the anti-Japanese pressure in Mexicali, ninety miles east of Tijuana.⁷⁷

Mexicali Japanese cotton farmers were also a middleman-minority in Mexicali. What is significant about their actions during the El Monte strike is that they revealed the inability of their middleman-minority position in Mexicali to maintain transborder ethnic solidarity, when their economic interests contradicted those of their co-ethnics in the north. As an Asian minority among the Mexican majority, the Mexicali Japanese faced growing anti-Japanese sentiment backed by rising Mexican nationalism and antipathy toward Japanese expansion in Asia during the 1930s. Anti-Japanese Mexican nationalism fueled by the El Monte strike made the socioeconomic position of the Japanese in Mexicali even more precarious and urged them to break their ethnic solidarity with their compatriots in Los Angeles, if only briefly. In such an unexpected way, Mexicali Japanese played a role in heightening the interethnic tension in Los Angeles by taking an extremely pro-Mexican stance despite their commonalities in race, class, and nationality.

Los Angeles Japanese did not publicly discuss the pro-strike actions by the Mexicali Japanese as a major problem. During the strike, in contrast with *La Opinión*, the *Rafu Shimpō* did not openly discuss the pro-strike statement and donations made by Japanese immigrants in Mexicali. Instead, the *Rafu Shimpō*'s correspondent in Mexicali emphasized the difficulty that fellow Japanese immigrants were facing in Mexicali. It reported that Japanese immigrant leaders in Mexicali visited the local Mexican chamber of commerce to declare that they had nothing to do with the El Monte strike and to ask for help to stop the anti-Japanese campaign.⁷⁸ However, ordinary Japanese immigrants in Los Angeles were unlikely to know the details of anti-Japanese actions such as boycott and fundraising campaigns in Mexicali, although immigrant leaders might have known them through their connections with

77. “El Boycott Contra Los Nipones,” *El Hispano-Americano*, June 25, 1933.

78. “Mekishikari Hōmen ni Hainichi no Kisei Ugoku” (Growing Anti-Japanese Sentiment in the Mexicali Area), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 28, 1933.

the Japanese consulate in Los Angeles and immigrants in Mexicali. Nor did Japanese diplomatic correspondence report any case of the anti-Japanese actions in Mexicali being publicly discussed and problematized in the ethnic Japanese community in Los Angeles. The absence of public discussion about the controversial actions by Mexicali Japanese implies that such actions were too disturbing for the Los Angeles Japanese community when the strike was an ongoing problem. Meanwhile, Japanese farmers in Los Angeles maintained their uncompromising stance, which could only exacerbate the situation of Mexicali Japanese. In short, each ethnic Japanese community in the borderlands attempted to secure their respective socioeconomic position as a middleman-minority even at the cost of transborder ethnic solidarity, revealing the situational and fluid nature of ethnoracial relations in the borderlands context.

By the end of June 1933, anti-Japanese sentiment, first generated in El Monte, traveled across the U.S.-Mexico border and resulted in the inter-ethnic tension between Japanese and Mexican residents in Mexicali. We could understand anti-Japanese sentiment found in both Southern California and Mexico as an important aspect of hemispheric Asian American history, a framework that historian Erika Lee applies to anti-Chinese sentiment.⁷⁹ Yet, we can better understand the expansion of anti-Japanese sentiment generated by the El Monte strike as a historical process that contributed to the making of transpacific borderlands because anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands forced the Japanese government to handle the volatile situation through its transpacific diplomatic network. As demonstrated in their frequent diplomatic exchanges, Japanese government officials in Japan, Mexico, and the United States could no longer ignore anti-Japanese sentiment circulating in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, since it could result in further restriction on the land use by Japanese farmers and in larger criticism against Japanese expansion in Asia.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE STRIKE AND UNSOLVED PROBLEMS IN LOS ANGELES AGRICULTURE

While Japanese diplomats were increasingly concerned about the impact of anti-Japanese sentiment spreading in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the situation remained precarious. On July 2, Hori, the minister plenipotentiary

79. Erika Lee, "Orientalisms in the Americas: A Hemispheric Approach to Asian American History," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3 (Oct., 2005): 235–56.

stationed in Mexico City, reported to both Uchida in Tokyo and Satō in Los Angeles that there was a rumor that Chinese residents in California were providing financial support for Mexican strikers and making contact with local newspapers in Mexico to turn anti-Chinese sentiment into anti-Japanese sentiment.⁸⁰ Although both Hori and Japanese merchants in Mexico believed the rumor to be false, Japanese diplomats in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands still paid careful attention to the situation, since ethnic Chinese in the United States were protesting strongly against Japan's aggression in China.⁸¹ Japanese farmers had not wavered in their stance toward Mexican strikers in Los Angeles, but without an agreement, the strikes could continue year after year, which neither party wanted. The remaining question was whether Los Angeles Japanese would understand the nature of the strike as a problem that would hurt not only local Japanese-Mexican relations but also international relations involving Japan, Mexico, and the United States.

After the failure of the first round of negotiations in late June, Thomas Barker, the chief of the Division of Labor Statistics and Law Enforcement of the California state government, was in charge of mediating a settlement by the order of Governor Rolph. On July 3, with the assistance of Barker, the Japanese and Mexican consuls held a meeting to discuss a solution with the representatives of both Japanese farmers and Mexican farmworkers. Willing to settle the strike, the farmworkers' representatives made a compromise and demanded twenty-five cents an hour, ten cents lower than the initial demand. Japanese farmers maintained that they could not pay more than seventeen cents an hour due to the decline in crop prices. Attempting to broker concessions from both sides, Barker proposed twenty cents an hour until August 15. Although the Mexican side finally agreed to Barker's proposal, the Japanese refused the compromise.⁸²

Two days later, Satō, feeling a responsibility to persuade Japanese farmers to reconsider, summoned the leaders of farm communities to the consulate building. At this meeting, Satō explained to them that the strike had become an international problem, generating serious anti-Japanese sentiment in the northern part of Mexico, increasing the possibility of a boycott against Japanese merchants in Mexico City, and giving Chinese residents in Mexico

80. Hori to Uchida, July 2, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.I, DAMFAJ.

81. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), III; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, updated and revised edition (1989; reprint, New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1998), 268–69.

82. Satō to Uchida, July 5, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol.I, DAMFAJ.

a chance to direct anti-Chinese sentiment against the Japanese. Then he urged Japanese farmers to make an agreement or else they would need to bear responsibility for the ongoing international conflicts. Responding to Satō, the farmers decided to end the strike for the moment, by agreeing to increase wages to 17.5 cents, a mere half-cent higher than their previous deal. While not totally convinced about the settlement and still concerned about their difficult economic situation, the Los Angeles Japanese finally came to understand the nature of the El Monte strike as a serious international problem that went beyond a local conflict and that could affect diplomatic relations involving three Pacific Rim nations.⁸³

The next day, July 6, the Japanese side again met with their Mexican counterparts. Like the previous meeting, state government officials such as Barker attended in order to mediate the negotiation. After several hours of deliberation, both sides finally reached a deal that consisted of three agreements. First, Mexicans working a minimum of six 9-hour days per week would be compensated \$1.50 a day and twenty cents an hour for overtime. Second, temporary farmworkers working less than six days a week would receive a flat rate of twenty cents an hour. Third, the Japanese had to re-employ the strikers without discrimination. The deal, effective immediately, was applicable until August 15 when both sides would discuss an extension if it was deemed necessary. The agreement did not specify names of crops so that it seemed to apply to all farmworkers working under Japanese farmers. It was signed by the representatives of Japanese farmers such as Fukami (general secretary of the Central Japanese Association of Southern California) and those of Mexican farmworkers such as Flores (general secretary of the Unión de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos), and witnessed by Japanese consul Satō, Mexican consul Martínez, and approved by chief Barker.⁸⁴

After this final agreement, Barker commented to the *Los Angeles Times*, “neither workers nor growers are satisfied with the agreement made . . . if the conditions of the workers and growers in this important industry are to be improved materially, there must be a decided increase in commodity prices [so that producers would gain more and pay more to farmworkers].” He gave a relatively fair observation of the settlement, although he did not touch upon the responsibility of white landowners for the interethnic conflict and the

83. Satō to Uchida, July 6, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ; “Daihyōsha Namida wo Nonde Shūgawa Chōteian wo Shōnin” (Japanese Representatives Accept the Proposal, Holding Back Tears), *Rafu Shimpō*, July 6, 1933.

84. Contract, July 6, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

fact that the Japanese buffered between landowners and strikers. His comment appeared at the bottom of page seventeen, where few would read it. This placement shows *Los Angeles Times*' anti-union stance and provides a strong contrast to the significant and substantial article on the settlement that appeared in *La Opinión*.⁸⁵

Interestingly, although strikers gained far less than their initial demand of thirty-five cents an hour, *La Opinión* celebrated the agreement as a victory for Mexican farmworkers, devoting three pages, including the front page, to the labor agreement. It emphasized the contribution of the Mexican government and particularly Calles to their alleged victory, obscuring the fact that farmworkers actually gained little. The newspaper claimed that farmworkers succeeded in making Japanese farmers accept the major part of their demands. Although the deal was not a complete victory for the Mexican side in terms of wages, it was significant that the Japanese farmers had to make their compromise as part of a tri-national negotiation, not as a mere local agreement they could easily ignore. Furthermore, in his comments to *La Opinión*, Flores emphasized that one of the largest triumphs of the agreement was that the Japanese would not employ Mexicans who had served as strikebreakers, which the official document of the agreement did not clearly mention.⁸⁶ In fact, Japanese farmers did not need many Mexicans after the harvest season and continued to employ their compatriots and other non-Mexican workers who helped them during the strike.⁸⁷

From the viewpoint of the Japanese side, the agreement was actually quite similar to the proposal offered by the Japanese farmers, since \$1.50 a day for nine hours of work was equivalent to 16.6 cents an hour. Even if farmworkers worked overtime, their average wages would be about 17 cents an hour. On July 18, Satō reported to Tokyo, writing that the agreement had “almost no impact” upon Japanese farmers and that they were satisfied with the result because it did not amount to much of a change.⁸⁸ In addition, the strike strengthened solidarity among the Japanese farmers and helped them

85. “Strikers Make Pay Pact,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1933.

86. “Concluye La Huelga al Rendirse Los Japoneses,” *La Opinión*, July 7, 1933; Contract, July 6, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

87. “Chōin wa Nattaga Bokukokujin no Kisan Sukunashi” (Despite the Agreement, Few Mexicans Returned), *Rafu Shimpō*, July 7, 1933; “Nihonjin ga Yatowanu to Bokukokujin Rōdōsha Himeci” (Mexican Workers Cry That Japanese Are Not Employing Them), *Rafu Shimpō*, July 12, 1933.

88. Satō to Uchida, July 18, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ. The *Rafu Shimpō* also emphasized that Japanese farmers had to pay 16.6 cents an hour by the final agreement. “Jisshitsuteki niwa 16 sen 6 rin” (Actually It Is 16.6 Cents), *Rafu Shimpō*, July 6, 1933.

understand the importance of ethnic associations.⁸⁹ However, their ethnic community also faced the problem of how to understand the anti-Japanese actions taken by Japanese residents in Mexicali, which seemed to divide the bonds of the overseas Japanese population in the U.S-Mexico borderlands. One week after the final agreement, two leaders of the Japanese Association of Mexicali came over to Los Angeles to explain their struggle during the strike. Visiting the Japanese consulate, the Central Japanese Association of Southern California, and the *Rafu Shimpō's* head office, they described their “delicate position” in Mexicali:

We did not want to take any action that would hurt your feelings since we owe a lot to the fellow Japanese in Southern California. However, we could not help but take that attitude, being stuck in a difficult situation and facing the dilemma.⁹⁰

By a “dilemma” they referred to their relationship with the Japanese in Los Angeles on the one hand and anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexico on the other hand.

The apology of Mexicali Japanese tells us that their cooperation in the Mexican nationalist campaign during the strike was not sincere but rather strategic, but this does not mean that Los Angeles Japanese were able to discuss openly what was happening in Mexicali during the strike. Even after the Mexicali Japanese came to apologize, the *Rafu Shimpō* only vaguely reported, “the fellow Japanese in that region [Mexicali] took an action that somewhat hurt the feelings of the Japanese in Southern California” without clearly explaining their pro-labor statement or their donation for Mexican strikers.⁹¹ In short, the chasm between Los Angeles Japanese and Mexicali Japanese during the strike was temporary but serious.

The Japanese consul Satō, in his summary report about the strike submitted to Tokyo in mid-July, blamed the local Mexican labor union for “threatening and coercing” Japanese residents in Mexicali to support the strikers. While criticizing the Mexican side, he paid little attention to the fact that poor working conditions of Mexican farmworkers in Japanese farms in Los Angeles caused anti-Japanese sentiment in Mexicali in the first place. Probably, Satō’s one-sided judgment about the actions of Mexicali Japanese

89. Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō*, 58–59, 79–80.

90. “Yoshida, Yoshizaki Ryōshi ga Kukyō wo Shakumēi” (Mr. Yoshida and Mr. Yoshizaki Explained Their Difficult Situation), *Rafu Shimpō*, July 14, 1933.

91. *Ibid.*

came from his nationalism as well as skepticism about the triangular relationship between the strike leader Flores, the Mexican consul Martínez, and the former president Calles. In other words, Satō's report left the impression that Japanese subjects in the United States and Mexico maintained their transborder ethnic solidarity.⁹²

Meanwhile, Fukushima, the Japanese diplomat stationed in Tijuana, had an uneasy feeling about what happened to the Mexicali Japanese since he had been observing their situation closely. Fukushima also sent a ten-page summary report to Tokyo and explained:

I think that the stringent situation in Mexicali forced the Japanese residents to take such difficult actions. But it is not desirable for Japan's overseas subjects to get extremely upset and overlook negative consequences of their myopic and desperate behavior [in supporting Mexican workers]. If they do, it will be difficult [for them] to make sound progress and development as a *daikokumin* [member of the great nation], which I would deeply deplore. Thus, I gave cautions to the leaders of the Japanese Association [of Mexicali].⁹³

The report shows Fukushima's sympathy to Japanese residents in Mexicali who found themselves torn between the politics of Southern California and Baja California. However, this ended up with a nationalistic conclusion that Japanese should act as a *daikokumin*, while the same time ignoring the structural causes of the strike rooted in the tri-racial hierarchy in Los Angeles agriculture. When Mexican nationalism divided Japanese ethnic solidarity in the borderlands, Fukushima could only appeal to Japanese nationalism to prevent such an unexpected situation from happening again in the future.

After all, the economic structure of Los Angeles agriculture did not change, preserving the intermediate position of Japanese tenant farmers between white landowners and Mexican farmworkers. Over the course of the El Monte strike, the Japanese and Mexican governments played a direct role in the interethnic conflict for the sake of themselves, drawing a clear line between the Japanese and Mexican sides. Although Japanese farmers faced anti-Japanese laws and had economic difficulties during the Depression,

92. Satō to Uchida, July 18, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ. The borderlands situation was, however, not as simple as Satō explained. Japanese immigrants in Ensenada were also under the pressure of Mexican nationalism growing in Baja California. See "La Sociedad Japonesa de Ensenada, lamenta el conflicto existente entre trabajadores mexicanos y japoneses en Los Angeles, Cal," *El Faro*, July 8, 1933, Miscellaneous Newspaper Collection.

93. Fukushima to Uchida, July 11, 1933, I-4-4-0-2, vol. 1, DAMFAJ.

they thrived in the 1930s in collaboration with white landowners.⁹⁴ Life was not easy for the Japanese farmers, too, who like Mexicans were under residential and occupational discrimination, but their economic position was an integral component of the white agribusiness of Los Angeles supported by landowners, business leaders, and government officials. Four years later, Clements, the manager of the Chamber's Agricultural Department, commented that the Chamber had "done a good deal of work for the Japanese in order to save ourselves."⁹⁵

Nevertheless, Clements's comments did not fully represent the attitude of the Chamber of Commerce regarding the Japanese-Mexican conflict in 1933. A month after the final agreement of the strike, the assistant secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, F. L. S. Harman, sent a letter to Clements writing, "I realize that much of the work to be done in this section [agriculture] can best be done by Mexican and Japanese labor, but if we are going to be continually hounded by these foreigners and held up by strikes, it is about time we threw them all out of the country. . . . Personally, I am not very much in sympathy with playing much with either the Mexicans or the Japanese."⁹⁶ Harman's comment reveals the vulnerable position of both Japanese and Mexican residents, whom the dominant white society perceived and treated as dispensable foreigners despite the fact that they were indispensable to the Los Angeles agriculture. This proves Satō's concern that the strike, although launched at the local level, could generate a larger problem that would affect international relations and the entire Japanese communities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Regardless of Harman's frustration or Satō's concern, the problems of poor labor conditions among Mexican farmworkers existed untouched. At the same time, anti-Japanese sentiment remained in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, as imperial Japan continued its expansionist policy in East Asia. Los Angeles was on the path to another large-scale strike by Mexican farmworkers against the Japanese in 1936.⁹⁷

In Southern California, Japanese tenant farmers leased lands from white landowners and employed Mexican workers, creating a triracial hierarchy that pitted farmers and workers against each other. The El Monte strike of 1933 evolved from a local Japanese-Mexican conflict into an international problem

94. See *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 58–59, 667; Edna Bonacich and John Modell, *Economic Basis for Ethnic Solidarity*, 253.

95. Clements to W. G. Arnoll, November 23, 1937, Box 64, Clements Papers.

96. F. L. S. Harman to Clements, August 23, 1933, Box 62, Clements Papers.

97. Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō*, 80.

in which anti-Japanese sentiment travelled across the U.S.-Mexico border, merged with Mexican nationalism, and forced Japanese residents in Mexicali to issue an unexpected pro-strike statement against their fellow Japanese in Los Angeles. This event drew the closer attention and involvement of both Japanese and Mexican governments through their consulate networks in Japan, Mexico, and the United States, strengthening the character of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as transpacific borderlands in which the tri-racial hierarchy of Los Angeles agriculture intersected with international relations of three Pacific Rim countries. In this context, the transborder anti-Japanese sentiment trumped Japanese ethnic solidarity across the border and thereby made Japanese diplomats and farmers in Los Angeles understand the international dimension of their local conflict and the necessity for the settlement.

The examination of the El Monte strike has also demonstrated the understudied role of Japanese immigrants in Mexico and the limits of their ethnic solidarity with Los Angeles Japanese. Just like their co-ethnics in Southern California, the Mexicali Japanese functioned as a middleman-minority, who faced pressures of Mexican nationalism in the guise of anti-Japanese sentiment. The strike revealed that during times of stress, they chose to identify publicly with Mexican nationalists rather than co-ethnics in the north despite their commonalities in race, class, and nationality. World War II proved another moment of national division across the border. The Japanese on both sides of the border faced intense suspicion; the U.S. government sent those along the West Coast to internment camps, while the Mexican government forcibly relocated the Baja Japanese to inland areas such as Mexico City in accordance with U.S. wartime policy. Further studies need to explore how wartime Mexican nationalism affected the way in which the Japanese in Mexico understood and handled their relationship with their co-ethnics in the United States and Japan during and after World War II. ■

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